

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A communications system for providing media arbitration via a communications protocol using consecutive communication slots, the system comprising:

 a plurality of communication nodes, each node arranged for communicating frames of data with the other nodes during a dynamic section 50 comprising dynamic communication slots, each having a communication slot number wherein the communications system is characterised in that each of the plurality of communication nodes includes including:

 a time base comprising consecutive timeslots, associated with the dynamic communication slots, each timeslot comprises at least two sub-time slots and a transmission action point located at a boundary between two of the at least two sub-time slot such that transmission of each frame of data starts and ends at a transmission action point and

 means for determining a communication slot number operable to increment the communication slot number if no communication is ongoing at the end of a time slot and to suspend incrementation of the communication slot number if communication is ongoing at the end of a time slot.

2. (Original) A communication node for use with a multi-node distributed communications system utilising a communications protocol using consecutive communication slots, the node arranged for communicating frames of data with other nodes of the system during dynamic communication slot of a dynamic section, each dynamic communication slot having a communication slot number, the node including:

 a time base comprising consecutive timeslots, associated with the dynamic communication slots, wherein each timeslot comprises at least tow sub-time slots and a transmission action point located at a boundary between two of the at least two sub-time slots, such that transmission of each frame of data starts and ends at a transmission action point and

 means for determining the communication slot number operable to increment a communication slot number if no communication is ongoing at the end of a time slot and to suspend incrementation of the communication slot number if communication is ongoing at the end of a time slot.

3. (Original) A method for providing media arbitration in a multi-node distributed communications system via a communications protocol using consecutive dynamic communication slots, of a dynamic section, the method comprising the steps of:

- providing a system wide time base of time slots, each timeslot comprising at least two sub-time slots and a transmission action point located at a boundary between two of the at least two sub-time slots;
- each node of the system communicating frames of data with the other nodes during the dynamic communication slots, wherein the transmission of each frame of data starts and ends at a transmission action point; and
- each communication node determining the communication slot number by incrementing the communication slot number if no frame of data is communicated at the end of a time slot and suspending incrementation of the communication slot number if a frame data is communicated at the end of the a time slot.

4. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 1, ~~node or method of claim 2 or method of claim 3~~ wherein the communication slots include static communication slots.

5. (Currently Amended) The system, ~~node or method~~ of claim 4 wherein a predetermined number of timeslots are utilised for each static communication slot.

6. (Currently Amended) The system, ~~node or method~~ of ~~any previous~~ claim 1 wherein a dynamically allocated number of timeslots are utilised for each dynamic communication slot.

7. (Currently Amended) The system, ~~node or method~~ of claim 6 wherein each dynamic communication slot in which frame transmission takes place is divided into alternating matching and mismatching time slots, the matching time slots being valid transmission slots.

8. (Currently Amended) The system, ~~node or method~~ of ~~any previous~~ claim 1 wherein each node comprises means for setting a current communication slot number in response to whether a communication start is detected in a matching or mismatching time slot.

9. (Currently Amended) The system, ~~node or method~~ of ~~any previous~~ claim 1 wherein each node has an associated communication slot number and is operable not to transmit in dynamic communication slots having communication slot numbers different than the associated communication slot number.

10. (Currently Amended) The system, ~~node or method~~ of ~~any previous~~ claim 1 wherein each node comprises means for extending a transmission to a transmission action point.

11. (Currently Amended) The system, ~~node or method~~ of claim 10 wherein the transmission is by transmission of a busy signal.

12. (Currently Amended) The system, ~~node or method~~ of ~~any previous~~ claim 1 wherein each node comprises means for adjusting the time base in response to a frame identity of a frame being communicated in a dynamic communication slot.

13. (New) The method of claim 3 wherein the communication slots include static communication slots.

14. (New) The method of claim 13 wherein a predetermined number of timeslots are utilised for each static communication slot.

15. (New) The method of claim 3 wherein a dynamically allocated number of timeslots are utilised for each dynamic communication slot.

16. (New) The method of claim 15 wherein each dynamic communication slot in which frame transmission takes place is divided into alternating matching and mismatching time slots, the matching time slots being valid transmission slots.

17. (New) The method of claim 3 wherein each node comprises means for setting a current communication slot number in response to whether a communication start is detected in a matching or mismatching time slot.

18. (New) The method of claim 3 wherein each node has an associated communication slot number and is operable not to transmit in dynamic communication slots having communication slot numbers different than the associated communication slot number.

19. (New) The method of claim 3 wherein each node comprises means for extending a transmission to a transmission action point.

20. (New) The method of claim 19 wherein the transmission is by transmission of a busy signal.